

# MALAY AND ENGLISH

## SPELLING.

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[A recent Circular Despatch of Lord Carnarvon directed attention to the want of uniformity in the spelling of Native names. A Committee was appointed to consider the subject, and the report they presented discussed very fully the difficulties surrounding the question, and proposed a complete system of spelling Malay words in English. It is most desirable that in all information contributed to our Society, the names should be spelt on some uniform system, and as that recommended by the Committee is now adopted by the Government in the *Gazette*, the *Council Papers*, the *Government Maps* &c., it is reprinted in the first number of our Journal for easy reference.

Hitherto the practise in the Straits has resembled that described by the famous traveller Dampier 200 years ago, who explained in his Preface "I have not been curious as to the spelling of the names of Places, Plants, Fruits, Animals &c. which in any of these remoter parts are given at the pleasure of Travellers, and vary according to their different Humours."]

### REPORT OF THE "SPELLING" COMMITTEE.

1. The Committee appointed to consider the subject of the correct spelling of Native Proper Names are of opinion that they cannot deal with the subject completely or satisfactorily, unless they take into consideration the whole question of writing the languages spoken in these Settlements in the Roman characters. These languages are practically two, viz., Chinese and Malay. Of these, Malay is the most important; first, because it is the common medium of communication between all the different races; secondly, because the names of places throughout the Settlements are Malay; and thirdly, because in the course of political events, Malay names of persons are likely to occur in public documents in far larger numbers than Chinese names.

2. The task of correctly rendering Chinese names, and other words, in the Roman character is an impossible one. Chinese, as it is well known, is not an alphabetical language, and consequently there is no question of finding equivalents in the Roman alphabet for Chinese letters. All that can be done, therefore, is

to endeavour to represent Chinese sounds in Roman letters. The great difficulty in doing this arises from the fact that in every dialect of Chinese there are sounds which no combinations or modifications of Roman letters are able to express adequately; so that the best system must be imperfect, and can only approximately represent Chinese words. Those members of the Committee who are most conversant with the Chinese language, are, however, of opinion, that the system suggested below is satisfactory as far as it goes; and further, that no additional modification of the Roman letters would be of any substantial advantage. But they strongly recommend that to secure identification in all important documents, Chinese names should be written in the Chinese as well as in the Roman character.

3. The difficulties in the way of writing Malay in Roman letters are not so great: still there are difficulties which everybody who has attempted to deal with the subject has felt. The chief of these is to be found in the circumstance that in Malay, more frequently than otherwise, the vowels are not expressed; so that here also as in Chinese, it is sounds and not letters that have to be represented. It should, however, be observed that the Malay writing is so far phonetic that the Roman characters, according to the system recommended by the Committee, will in the main give the spelling as well as the sound. Again, in order to help persons unacquainted with, or possessing but little knowledge of the language, it has been found absolutely necessary to mark the difference between short and long vowel sounds by accents of some kind, and great care is required to make these as intelligible as possible: and for simplicity's sake, as few as may be. Moreover, some of the consonants in Malay have no single equivalent, and others in certain situations have a special and peculiar use.

4. Hitherto no one system of spelling has been generally recognized and adopted, which has led to several absurd mistakes, such as *Seldngor* being spelt as *Salengore*, *Ldrut* as *Laroote*, *Krtan* as *Curreean*; but the various authorities in Malay, however they may differ on other points, have with one consent adopted the Continental or Italian system of vowels as best suited to the requirements of Malay; and the Committee have no hesitation in following them so far.

The following system they believe to be sufficiently accurate, and as simple as the circumstances of the case permit.

## I. THE VOWELS.

5. The five vowels when used in writing Malay and Chinese words have the *Continental*, or, more strictly, the *Italian*, sound.

They sometimes have a long sound, and are then written with a circumflex accent over them, thus â, ê &c.; and sometimes they have a short sound, when they are written a, e &c., without any accent. This is more fully explained in the subjoined table. The Committee consider that the labour of writing the accent over the long vowels will be far more than compensated for by the accuracy in pronunciation that will be secured, as the accent will point out the accentuated syllables. If "*Sardwak*" and "*Sembilan*" had always been so written, Englishmen would have been saved the absurd mistake of pronouncing them *Sarahwhack* and *Sambilan*, as if the accent were on the first syllable in each case instead of the second.

6. But in addition to those vowel sounds which may be fairly represented by the five vowels marked as long and short, there is another of exceedingly frequent occurrence in Malay which is so vague and indefinite that no natural representative at once suggests itself, and Malay scholars have given different renderings of it. After long and careful deliberation the Committee have come to the conclusion that there will be the least danger of misunderstanding if this sound be uniformly expressed by the letter e so written. The mark of shortness (ě) is very important to distinguish it from the common short e as sounded in the English words "pen," "met," to which it bears little resemblance. The sound which we wish to express by this character (ě) is that of e in such words as "lateral" "considerable."

The Arabic letter ع (ain), which is found in a few Malay words, takes the sound of all the vowels, long and short, in turn. And its presence will be indicated by a dot written underneath thus â . ê . &c., or a . e . &c.

8. There are two diphthongal sounds which will be written *au* and *ei*, pronounced as in the table below.

## 9. TABLES OF VOWELS.

The Vowels.	Their sound in English.	Examples in Malay.
â a	Soprano Diploma	lâma, kepâla The second <i>a</i> in mâkan
ê e	Fête Ten	Pêrak, krêta sendok, preksa
î i	Pique Tin	tîdor, pîsau pintu, bintang
ô o	Those Proportion	kôrek, tôlak tongkat, sarong
û u	Truth Full	bûka, gûrû tumbok, tunjuk
ë	As the e in "lateral" "considerable"	këbûn, përampûan, pëng- lima, bëtul
au	Faust (as in German) with the sound of <i>now</i>	bâkau, kërbau
ei	Height	Sûngei, bâgei
â. ê. î. ô. û. or a. e. i. o. u.	The dot indicates the presence of ع (ain.)	

## II. THE CONSONANTS.

10. A table of Consonants is given below with their respective sounds, and their Malay equivalents. It will be observed that "c," "g" soft, and "q" are omitted, and they should never be employed in writing Oriental languages in Roman characters, as their sound is better represented by "s," "j," "k," respectively, and the use of them has led to strange mistakes. An instance of this is the name of Kedah, which having been spelt "Quedah," has come to be pronounced "Kwîdah."

11. It is important to remember that whenever the letters "ng" occur together they represent one letter only, and that letter has uniformly the sound of "ng" in "singing," not that of "ng" either in "single" or in "singed." Whenever it is intended that the "g" should be sounded hard, as in "single," the word must be written with a second "g" as "Sûnggoh" "Trenggânu." The letters "m" and "y" are only used as Consonants.

12. The final "k" in Malay words is usually silent in the Straits Settlements and the Malay Peninsula; or rather it is only partially sounded, being begun and then stopped suddenly.

13. The apostrophe (') represents the Malay mark "hamza" ('). When it occurs in the middle of a word, as in "sa'orang," it serves as a mark of separation between syllables; at the end of a word it has the same effect as the final "k."

14. Some of the Consonants are written, like the vowels representing ع (ain), with a dot beneath. This is the case where two or more letters in the Malay Alphabet are represented by one Roman character. Almost all the characters bearing this mark are confined to words of Arabic origin, such as a certain number of proper names, and words connected with Religion. Their use therefore will be limited, the great bulk of words in the Malay language being written in the simpler characters.

15. We can now give the table of Consonants which will actually be used. Whenever nothing is said respecting pronunciation the letter has the ordinary English sound.

## TABLE OF CONSONANTS.

Consonants.	Pronunciation.	Malay name.
b		Ba
ch	as in "church"	Cha
d	as in "day"	Dal
f	often sounded like "p"	Fa
g	always hard as in "gain"	Ga
h		Ha
j	as in joy"	Jim
k		Kaf
kh	Like "ch" in "loch"	Kha
gh	"Kh" intensified	Ghain
l		Lam
m		Mim
n		Nun
ng	as in "Singing"	Nga
p		Pa
r		Ra
s		Sim
sh		Shim
t	soft, tip of tongue against teeth	Ta
th	as in "thick"	Tha
w		Wau
y		Ya
ny	as 'ni' in "Spaniard"	Nya
z		Za
,	{ In the middle of a word it marks the division of syllables as in sa'orang: at the end of a word it has the same effect as final k.	Hamza.



16. The following Arabic consonants marked with a dot beneath, occur occasionally and must also be borne in mind:—

Consonants.	Pronunciation.	Malay name.
d	Hard	Da
h	in back of throat	Ha
k	Hard K. When used at the end of a word it is only partially sounded being begun and then suddenly stopped.	Kof
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l	Like Welsh Ll.	La
s	Hard like ss.	Sod
t	Hard against roof of mouth	Ta
th	as in "this"	Tha
z		Zal

17. \* A list of proper names is attached, carefully spelt according to the system here recommended.

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[\* This list is too lengthy to be published in this Journal, but copies of it can be obtained at the Colonial Secretary's Office.]